

## THE FATHER OF JOHN HENRY.

Hezekiah McInturf is my husband. John Henry is our only child. Of course every one declares he is spoiled. The relatives who were too far away to know him write Hezekiah and me pages of advice in regard to his up-bringing, always ending with: "All only children are selfish and exacting, but a firm government a steady unwavering discipline will do much to counteract the misfortunes of his position." The underscored words fairly made me shiver over the heavy responsibility resting upon us, and the certainty of John Henry's fate seemed assured. I watched apprehensively for signs of greediness and avarice on his part when he was of tender years, especially during the visits of his playmates. When he shared his toys and books readily I felt a sense of disappointment, so firmly convinced was I that he would pursue an opposite course, and I braced myself heroically for the "proper discipline." As years passed it was an undeniable fact that John Henry was generous and open-handed. I breathed more freely, but then his faults perhaps lay deeper, and having no brothers and sisters to call forth these hidden traits they must lie dormant until he arrived at years of discretion, when they would stand revealed in all their magnitude. Still, while I worried and watched and tormented myself, I hardly think that I worried John Henry. He was a happy, healthy child, no better and no worse than most children. He went to bed early, slept well, studied moderately, played immoderately. At sixteen early hours for retiring were a thing of the past. Hitherto I had played all sorts of games with him during the day when he cared to stay within-doors. Now, I gave up many evenings to the same: Sometimes John Henry studied, sometimes his friends spent the evening with him; sometimes I had a fascinating new book ready for him (I may say here that I detest games, but John Henry does not suspect it.) Hezekiah laughed at my pain and my anxiety, especially when John Henry occasionally stayed out late at night. "Boys will be boys," he said, "and John Henry is a much better boy than I was. He'll come through all right." And then while I lay wide awake until I heard John Henry's footsteps on the stair, and light as they were, I always heard them, Hezekiah snored peacefully. And then John Henry went to the college in our town. For a while no one could be more studious, more regular in his habits. And then there were late hours growing more and more frequent. "No wonder you look pale," Hezekiah said to me one day, "the way you lie awake at night over that boy.

If ever I wake up, I'm sure to find you staring. Do take things easy, Prudentia, and don't meet trouble half way. Don't you suppose that I understand boys better than you do? And if I saw anything serious in John Henry's conduct, don't you suppose I would put a stop to it?" One night Hezekiah went to bed with a headache. At last he fell asleep and hours passed. Suddenly he flopped on his side, all his senses alert. "Confound that boy! Can't he be more quiet, waking me up just as I forgot this miserable pain in sleep?" he cried. "It must be midnight."

"Oh, no, it hasn't struck eleven," I began; but Hezekiah did not hear me. He bounded out into the hall and confronted John Henry like an avenging spirit. "How dare you keep your poor mother awake and rouse the house at this hour of the night, sir?"

"But, indeed, sir—" John Henry remonstrated.

"No excuses, sir. Go to bed at once, and do see if you can be quiet. I should like to get an hour's sleep before daybreak if I could be allowed the privilege." Back to bed came Hezekiah, and in a few moments slept soundly.

So time went on. Then my boy came to me. He was in trouble. A certain clique of rather fast young men had made much of him, and John Henry was in debt.

"Why don't you go to your father?" I asked.

"Oh, you know how it is with papa; there's no knowing what he will say, he gets so an—well, you know, mother, he's rather quick," said John Henry.

But I insisted on his going frankly to his father. In the meantime I gave a hint to Hezekiah. "Don't come down on him," I said; "talk to him calmly and sensibly, and win his confidence." Later, I asked John Henry if he were not glad that he had followed my advice.

"No, mother," he said. "I shall never, never go to father again in any trouble as long as I live."

For almost the first time, across the bright, open face of my boy came a look half sullen, half defiant. I dared ask no further. Hezekiah was jubilant. "I settled him," he announced. "You'll see that boy will never be such a fool again," and he took up his paper with an air of complacent superiority. But I watched my boy, not conspicuously, but lovingly, and in silence. I almost envied Hezekiah his unruffled serenity. I felt so helpless. A man knows the temptations and dangers surrounding a boy—a mother can only guess at them. Months passed, and I noticed that John Henry's healthy color had faded. He was pale and often avoided my eye. I mentioned the fact to Hez-

ekiah, but as usual, he laughed at my "womanish apprehensions," and declared that women were happy only when miserable. But I knew something was wrong. And when one day, I came across John Henry in the attic, his head bowed in his hands, the picture of despair, I begged him to confide in me.

"You'll tell father," he said, with that look on his face which pained me so to see. When all was told, I was relieved. It was evident that the boy had erred more through ignorance than evil intent. It was a long story. "You always told me, mother, that I must take the blame for doing wrong—that I had been given will and character, and that I must not shift responsibility, and I don't. I must abide the consequences, but I must suffer," said John Henry in conclusion.

"That's true, and yet I think that I can help you," I said. "Let us talk it over."

That happened years ago. John Henry alluded to it the other day. "I don't believe even you, mother, knew how utterly despairing I felt when you found me," he said, "nor the weight that seemed lifted from me after my talk with you. It was a point where many boys 'go to the bad.'" He said more which I will not put down. John Henry is married now and has two boys of his own. Hezekiah is very proud of John Henry. "Just look at him" he says; "bright as a dollar, upright, the minister's right hand, every one tells me he is the rising man of the town. Didn't I tell you, Prudentia, that he would come out all right?"

Hezekiah looked amazed the other day when after his saying much the same thing to John Henry himself, the latter said quickly: "Yes, and all thanks to mother. Mother and I went through college together, didn't we, mother?"

John Henry says that he intends to be his sons' best friend. "It takes some time and thought, but it pays," he declares. "It's too much to expect all the thought and judgment and guardianship from the mother. At sixteen the boy looks more to his father; mother is lovely and good, but she's not a man, father talks understandingly. His opinion carries weight. It does seem queer that so many fathers shirk it, or won't see it."

And John Henry's mother put it in the form of a question: "Why don't the fathers see it? How dare they put aside lightly or indifferently, the privilege of fatherhood granted to them by the Father of our Lord Christ?"—*The Interior*.

It takes both grace and grit to get along pleasantly with people who never make mistakes.